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Vie Francigene for All?

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Free Wheels onlus (Italy)

ABSTRACT

In 1986 a law was introduced which obligated Italian municipalities and provinces to adopt Plans to Remove Architectural Barriers (Peba), an obligation extended to private entities with the 1989 law. Within thirty-three years the problem returned, especially for cultural heritage, which was ever more linked to touristic practices. This involves a lack of intervention which limits or impedes 60 million European citizens from visiting them, and over 300 million potential international tourists with specific needs (Eurostat, 2015, 2018). This paper proposes a reflection on the cultural changes needed to really make the artistic and landscape heritage of our country “for everyone”. The in-depth analysis will begin by looking at the Italian legal framework, among the most advanced in Europe, and that of incentivising to then evolve into an initial gathering of good practices in Europe. Reoccurring examples supply an introductory document to consult and an updated archive of suggestions to reduce limitations for those who want to access routes and structures, starting with the Via Francigena (EAVF, 2018). The aim is to show how this religious-cultural route can be an example of tourism for all, similar to the French route to Santiago de Compostela, where, every year, just over 300,000 pilgrims arrive on foot, as well as 2.5 million religious tourists (Gonzales et alii, 2014). The analysis is directed towards the evaluation of physical and cultural barriers, to understand if lasting solutions for all are just advantageous for those with specific, permanent or temporary needs, or for the whole community. There are plenty of examples of the latter: the remote control, made to help those who are bedridden became a day-to-day object. Just like voice-activated phones, initially thought of for blind people, are now used by most people as a form of hands-free technology! The aim is to plan and create a sustainable and resilient society for everyone.

Keywords: Disability; Italian Law; Pilgrimage; Via Francigena; Best Practices

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Una legge del 1986 ha introdotto l'obbligo per Comuni e Province italiane di adottare i Piani per l'Eliminazione delle Barriere Architettoniche (Peba), un obbligo allargato anche ai privati con la legge del 1989. A distanza di 33 anni il problema si ripropone, soprattutto nella fruizione dei beni culturali sempre più legati alle pratiche turistiche. Si tratta di un deficit d'intervento che limita o impedisce la visita a 60 milioni di cittadini europei con disabilità ed a oltre 300 milioni di potenziali turisti internazionali con esigenze specifiche (Eurostat, 2015, 2018).

Il paper si propone di riflettere sul cambiamento culturale necessario per rendere realmente "per tutti" il patrimonio artistico e paesaggistico del nostro Paese, la *leisure pursuits*. L'approfondimento prenderà il via dal quadro normativo italiano, tra i più avanzati d'Europa, e da quello d'incentivazione per poi evolversi in una prima raccolta di buone prassi presenti sul territorio europeo. Esempi ripetibili e replicabili forniscono un abbecedario da consultare e un archivio sempre aggiornato di suggerimenti per ridurre i limiti delle persone che desiderano fruire di percorsi e strutture a partire dalla Via Francigena (EAVF, 2018). L'obiettivo è di dimostrare come questo itinerario religioso-culturale possa essere un esempio di turismo per tutti, al pari del Cammino Francese verso Santiago De Compostela, dove ogni anno si accolgono poco più di 300.000 pellegrini a piedi, oltre i 2,5 milioni di turisti religiosi (Gonzales et alii, 2014).

Il tracciato dell'analisi è indirizzato alla valutazione delle barriere fisiche e culturali, per comprendere se soluzioni realmente per tutti vadano semplicemente a vantaggio di chi ha esigenze specifiche permanenti o temporanee, o all'intera comunità. E gli esempi non mancano: il telecomando nato per aiutare le persone allettate è diventato strumento quotidiano. Allo stesso modo, i comandi vocali dei telefoni, pensati per non vedenti, oggi sono adottati da ciascuno di noi per usare la tecnologia a mani libere! L'obiettivo è quello di progettare e costruire società sostenibili e resilienti per tutti.

Keywords: Disabilità; Legislazione italiana; Pellegrinaggio; Via Francigena; Buone pratiche

Introduction

In 2018, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation dedicated the international day for the disabled to the theme of "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies for all", with the aim to favour initiatives for disabled people, in line with the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda on sustainability as well as other international agreements, such as the "New Urban Agenda". The slogan "leave no one behind" sums up the Agenda for inclusive, sustainable development and promotion for a resilient society for all. Disability continues to collide with many cultural and environmental barriers around the world, the removal of which is a crucial step for the wellbeing of a billion people (80% of developed countries) who live with one or more forms of temporary or chronic disability.

The Italian law N. 13/86, which obligated Italian municipalities and provinces to adopt Plans to Remove Architectural Barriers (P.e.b.a.) is thirtythree years old, but very few of the over 8 thousand Italian municipalities have carried out these obligations. There

are those who just see inefficacy and bureaucratic flaws, but businessmen and politicians must see an opportunity to contribute in the sustainable development on a social and economic level. Like a pilgrim whose journey improves the route they are travelling, this contribution would establish the basis for a change in cultural steps towards the idea of universal integration (and planning). The wayfarer's measured/rhythmic step, which helps while receiving help from others and accompanies while being accompanied, represents a symbol of sustainable society where we can begin to think of a new use for cultural heritage and emerging touristic practices together. Thus, religion has long been an integral motive for undertaking journeys and is usually considered the oldest form of non-economic travel (Jackowski and Smith 1992). Every year millions of people travel to major pilgrimage destinations around the world, both ancient and modern in origin. Jackowski (2000) estimated that approximately 240 million people a year go on pilgrimages, the majority being Christians, Muslims, and Hindus (cited by Olsen and Timothy, 2006, p.18). Slow tourism is increasingly popular, which must obviously be accessible to all, in other words no pilgrim must be left behind; we must cut down the limits that reduce or impede 60 million European citizens with disabilities from embarking on pilgrimages, as well as over 300 million potential international tourists with specific needs.

Disability is a complex, evolving and multi-dimensional concept; they impact on people's lives in many areas (**Figure 1**), for example in terms of: mobility and the use of transport equipment; access to buildings; participation in education and training, the labour market and leisure pursuits; and social contacts and economic independence (Eurostat,2015).

This theme of architectural barriers continues to be a point of discussion and is even in expansion between the spheres of regulations and phenomenal reality. Italy is an important example and even more so in relation to cultural routes; firstly, the pilgrimages: with a whole series of studies which will be proposed thanks to different experiences across the country with particular attention to issues regarding disabilities!

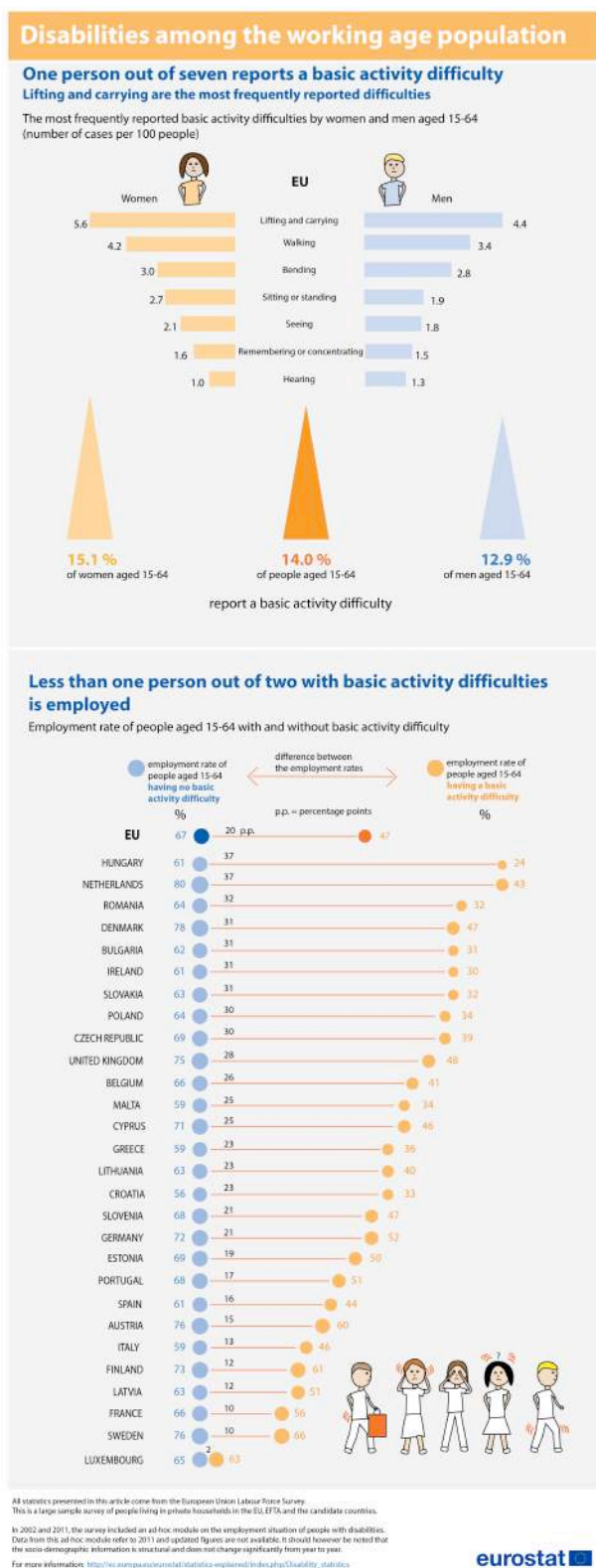


Figure 1: Disability in Europe
Source: eurostat, 2015b

1. Architectural barriers between definition and development

But what are barriers really? They are talked about in a more or less correct way (Agostiano et alii, 2016; Angelaccio, et alii, 2007; Davis, 2016), but they are little-known, if one doesn't live with physical, sensory or intellectual/relational limitations themselves, little is done to help. Giving a definition is equally as complex, we think of them as physical barriers that limit the access of a disabled person: the classic example is steps of a doorway to a public/private building, which impedes the access of people in wheelchairs. Initial legislation was intended in this way at first too, as seen in the Decree of the President of the Republic on 24th July 1996, n. 503 (*Consiglio Superiore dei Lavori Pubblici*, 1996):

'architectural barriers' refers to:

- Physical barriers that are an issue for anyone and in particular those who, for whatever reason, have permanent or temporary limited mobility;
- Obstacles that limit or impede the comfortable and secure use of spaces, equipment or parts to anyone;
- The lack of precautions and signage that enable orientation and visibility of areas and any dangers for everyone and, in particular blind, visually impaired and deaf people.

This definition, however, was already "old" to begin with; outdated by several constitutional articles and subsequently outdated by the O.N.U. convention (**Figure2**), adopted by the ONU General Assembly on 13th December 2006 which took effect in Italy on 3rd May 2008. It seems it was adopted by 160 nations globally, while being signed by 160 nations and endorsed by 88 (Progettoinclusivo.it, 2016).

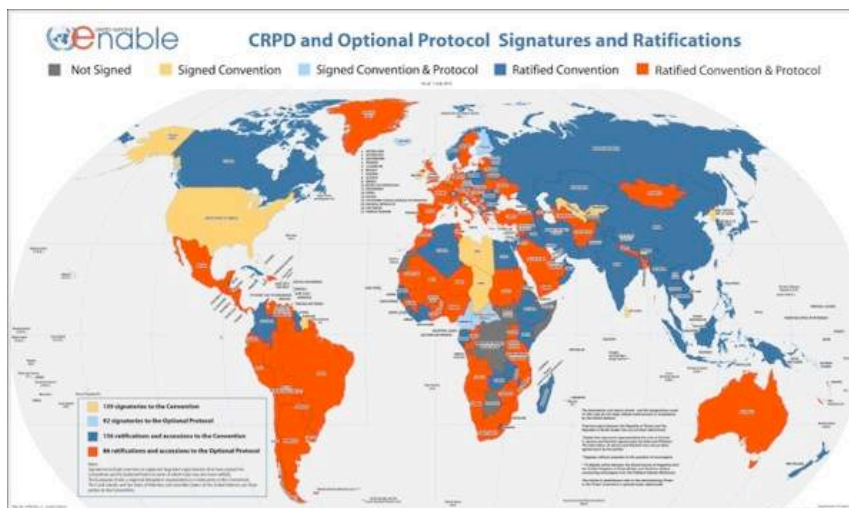


Figure 1: O.N.U Convention signatures and ratification

Source: Web, progetto inclusive.it, 2016

In these two occasions, the different starting points are notable and disabled people are identified as citizens with the same rights and duties as the rest of society. Disability is just "a result of interaction between people with disabilities and aptitudinal and environmental barriers, which impede their full and efficient participation in society on a basis of equality".

If such a definition on the one hand integrates the disabled citizen into social life, on the other, it also amplifies the reach of all those who are temporarily or momentarily limited, in terms of movement, expression and existential development. This way, they will be also utilised by the elderly or near-elderly; people who have had a bad/mild accident; pregnant women and people in other similar situations.

2. Italy between regulations and reality

Italian legislation is therefore slowly adapting to this transition, while society needs more time to accept these legislative and behavioural standards on the basis of some sections.

The reference standard is Law 13/1989 (Official Gazette, 1989), which gives «provisions to favor the overcoming and removal of architectural barriers in public residential buildings, new or to be restored» and also provides a state contribution for the removal of architectural barriers in existing buildings. There are three criteria on which the legislation is based: accessibility, adaptability and visitability.

- Accessibility: a building and its real estate and environmental units are accessible to people with reduced or impeded mobility or senses so they can enter and experience areas and use equipment safely and independently;
- Visitability: private places like houses or workplaces can be visited by those with reduced or impeded mobility or senses with access to meeting places and at least one bathroom;
- Adaptability: a place modified to make it accessible and usable even by people with reduced or impeded motor or sensory abilities.

On this last criterion there is an increasingly strong debate. The technical evolution has been so rapid as to cover almost all cases of inaccessibility, while the adaptable term provides a "gimmick" for doing nothing, or for doing it "cheaply". The subsequent implementing regulation, namely the Ministerial Decree M.D. of 14th June 1989 No. 236, then established the design criteria for each environment, both its interior and exterior, with each specification relating to its functions and dimensions starting from doors to the height of handles, from the maximum slope of a floor to the height of facilities etc.

To give further momentum and clarity to this regulation is Law 220/2012, which adapted old articles of the Civil Code, dating back to the 40s, both for a shared and residential area.

On the public front, reference is made to the aforementioned Decree of the President

of the Republic 503/1996, "*laying down regulations for the removal of architectural barriers in buildings, spaces and public services*". In addition to emphasising the obligatory nature of guaranteeing equal access rights for people with disabilities, the decree indicates specifications of aids needed in public buildings deem it accessible. For further consideration, it must also be said that the D.P.R. 503/1996 and Ministerial Decree 236/1989 referred to other previous regulations: law of 30th March 1971, No. 118, art. 27 (architectural barriers and public transport) and law no. 13 of 9th January 1989 (regulations to favour the obsolescence and removal of architectural barriers in private buildings).

This continuous reference of regulations led to the need to define a Unicum, so in 2004 the MIT - Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport - reactivated the Permanent Study Commission (established by article 12 of MD 236/89) and charged them with the task of determining solutions to the problems concerning the application of technical regulations. This necessity was reiterated by the Chamber of Deputies Act 1013 of 10/21/2013 in 2013, which proposed the issuing of a single regulation to unify, standardise and clearly dictate the technical directives for "*public and private buildings and public spaces and services or those open to the public or for public utility*", as well the promotion of a universal design for the construction of environments and products utilisable by all or at least the majority of people.

Progress is slow and, moreover, each Region acts "in its own way" to arrange contributions for the removal of the architectural barriers, as mentioned by law 13/1989. The non-repayable grants are quantified on the basis of expenditure – based on three expense ranges and with an upper limit – and must be requested from the municipality of residence, which carries out checks required by law and, if there are no impediments, supplies them after the issuing of invoices that certify the interventions made and the expenses incurred. Alternatively, tax concessions, such as IRPEF tax deductions for building renovations and overcoming architectural barriers, can be used. VAT would be 4% and the deduction for the purchase of aids would be 19%.

In the geographical reality, the Italian landscape offers ample room for improvement and, consequently, great opportunity for development. The vast majority of Italian municipalities fail, or do not comply with the P.E.B.A. obligation, to plan the removal of architectural barriers. Thanks to the lobbying action of some associations, communities now discuss the issue and administrations slowly provide for the standardisation of buildings and cities, in no particular order.

Following a parallel and similar path in communities, thanks to word of mouth, is the development of a slow-route culture (or tourism). This allows us to introduce the concept of universal usability to sustainable tourism, in order to break down a cultural barrier that hampers this process. To make a place "for all", there is NO need to distort it and there is NO need to invest large amounts of money. Integration means applying coherent thought from the beginning of the project and really wanting the asset, be it a path or an ancient church, to be enjoyed by every person who travels the path. This means enhancing the asset itself and opening it to humanity to make it alive and experienced!

In the light baggage of every pilgrim there is flexibility, intelligence to follow a path and the ability to adapt to its characteristics at their own pace. In the same way, the solutions and tourism itself must adapt according to the places it comes across: each place is unique and cannot have the same evaluation parameters. In other words, it

means having to find the right solution for each place to allow people with specific needs to experience it without it being altered. Today, all this is possible thanks to modern technologies which allow us to find a suitable solution while respecting the financial resources that vary from municipality to municipality.

3. The Meeting of Cultural Routes to Rebuild Europe Together

In 2016, the Council of Europe signed an agreement with the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), to promote Cultural Routes certified by the Council of Europe. The agreement contains a generic cooperation Memorandum signed by the Secretaries-General of UNWTO and the Council of Europe in Madrid and Strasbourg, without any specifications to make the routes accessible to all. This is surely not a factor of will since the Council of Europe has extensive experience in the field of accessibility (it suffices to think of the recommendations and publications on the subject at the Council of Europe link in 2018), the authors hope that this shortcoming will soon be remedied, particularly in the context of cultural routes.

A possible "key" would be to propose to the Committee of Ministers the specification or insertion of the issue of accessibility in the six criteria for route certification. Currently the criteria are as follows:

- Include a representative theme of European and municipal values of at least three European countries
- Transnational and multidisciplinary scientific research
- Research on memory and European history, contributing to today's interpretation of diversity in Europe
- Support cultural and educational exchange among the youth
- Develop innovative projects in the sustainable cultural tourism sector
- Develop touristic products aimed at different target audiences

Although the sixth criterion refers to an audience with different needs, it would undoubtedly be useful to expand and integrate this concept towards "universal usability", or alternatively, to add a seventh criterion concerning this aspect, regardless of whether they are hiking experiences (like real paths) or sites scattered throughout Europe. The inclusion of this additional principle should aim to add an additional praise label to emphasise the importance of the universal usability of the territory, for those who work towards the respect of this objective.

In this scenario, the previous government adopted a Strategic Tourism Plan 2017-2022 (MIBACT, 2017) where accessibility is an aspect which is often referred to. We see it, for example, in this excerpt:

"In a country like Italy - where the travel and holiday experience is characterised by a rich cultural offering, one of landscape, art and traditions – the issue of physical accessibility should be naturally considered as a transversal element, a distinctive element for a hospitable territory where accommodation facilities and services for travellers are able to meet the

most diverse needs. In order for Italy to give full application to the principles included in fundamental charters – such as the Italian Constitution, the Madrid Declaration and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Special Needs – it is necessary to act on several fronts; developing a series of actions that fully promote the culture of hospitality and that represent the country's level of civilization" (MIBACT, 2017).



Figure 3: The 11 criteria

Source: MIBACT, 2017

Sadly, it must be pointed out that this Plan is not a law and as such does not fall within the Primary Sources of Law. This limitation can already be seen in the "Atlas of roads" portal published on the MIBACT website (2017a), which clearly shows that this topic does not have a specific place among the criteria chosen for cultural route certification.

Nevertheless, the system of Romee (**Figure 4**) lends itself to a real and concrete application of these rights in an international framework.



Figure 4: Il sistema delle Romee

Source: running.gazzetta.it

4. How to intervene?

Therefore, opening a route to people with specific needs requires a completely revolutionary approach: it is not enough to connect two points with the least amount of traffic, perhaps taking advantage of CAI paths or Eurovelo routes (also designed without the slightest consideration of the disabled); today other aspects must be evaluated, such as the consistency of the land (perhaps in the most dry and rainy seasons), the gradient of slopes, the presence of verges along asphalted stretches and, last but not least, the detailed characteristics of hospitality and services for walkers.

The first revision appeal was made by one of the authors of this treatise in an article written for the European Association of Via Francigena Ways (EAVF):

"Administrations at every level, superintendencies that handle routes, please work so that one day the Ways you define as 'Official' are accessible to everyone, and if there are obstacles,

smooth them out; if there are streams, build bridges and make them accessible to all; if there are stones, ask each pilgrim to pick one up and throw it to the side of the road; you will soon realise that that road will be travelled by more and more people, because a "stony ground" will become a "white road". If you do this, you won't distort the route, because the true route is that of the soul, and not of the feet and where they take you. I believe it is everyone's human right to have equal opportunities, to be able to travel the same journey in the same way without having to resort to diversions, often on sections that are unsafe due to traffic" (EAVF, 2018).

Financial return on investment in tourist routes is increasingly shared! It's enough to verify a consistent increase in pilgrims where an integration policy has been applied, as shown by the statistics drawn up by the Xunta de Galicia on Spanish routes.

For example, as can be seen from the image below of the Santiago De Compostela Pilgrim Reception Office site: in August 2018 there were 60,412 pilgrim visits, whereas in 2010 visits had risen to 61,542, 123 of which were people with reduced mobility who withdrew from their journey to Compostela (**Figure 5**). Needless to say, disabled travellers of other months must be added, as well as those with different types of unconsidered requirements and those that had travelled other sections of the journey without getting certification that they had completed the pilgrimage.

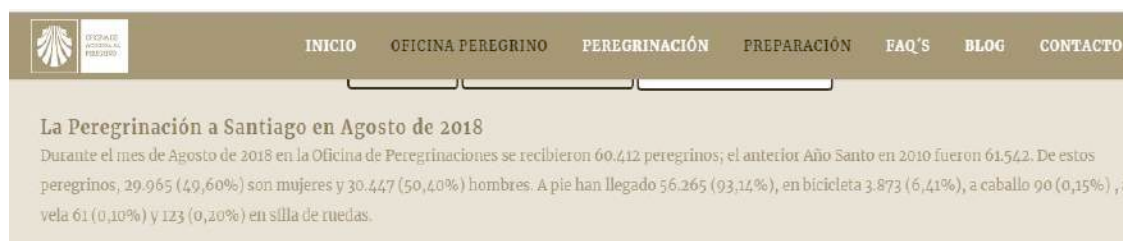


Figure 5: Pilgrims of 2018 and 2010

Source: Oficina Pellegrino

5. Pilgrims and reduced mobility on the road

The guide of these routes is one of the writers of this article, Pietro Scidurlo, of the *Free Wheels onlus* association; first a pilgrim with reduced mobility, then author for *Terre di Mezzo Editore* and now, path plotter for all. He's travelled over 6 thousand kilometres on the roads of Europe (**Figure 6**). The first result of his work was accessibility for all on two important faith routes: the French Way to Santiago de Compostela, from the Pirenaica chain to the Atlantic Ocean, and the path of San Benedetto da Norcia.



Figure 6: Cammino Francese verso Santiago De Compostela
Source: Alberto Conte – Sloways



Figure 7: Access to parking in León
Source: google street view

5.1 The case in Spain

Speaking of infrastructure solutions abroad, an example to take inspiration from is bicycle bridges crossing railways in the city, such as the bridge in León or at the entrance to Astorga (both located in the Castilla y León region; Municipality of León). Since 2005, Spain has implemented a 'Safety Plan' aimed at protecting the safety of people at railway crossings, creating better passages in many points or increasing protection at carriageable railway crossings. In the 2005-2008 four-year period, 731 steps were removed and the safety of a further 545 people was increased. Between 2009 and 2012, the removal of 1200 steps increased the safety of about 1,301 crossings. In recent years, León has witnessed a total reconversion of its physiognomy following a modern urbanistic line that shows its interest in the communication

between all areas of the city through new bridges and pedestrian walkways. Photo 7 shows the architectural solution introduced in an urban context, between residential districts and parking areas. Areas in which the ministerial path of the French Way to Santiago De Compostela still passes. The Renfe group and Ministry of Development (Renfe, 2000) project was carried out by Ing. A. Pérez Alfonso in 1984, between December 1985 and April 1998. Although it was built in reinforced concrete with an iron parapet and a tile floor, the entire work will soon be replaced.

5.2 An opportunity to rethink the city

Accessibility improves the liveability of the city by placing people at the centre of urban life. The creation of underground car parks (where possible), diversion of traffic, widening of pavements allow easier access, protecting León's precious heritage. In this specific case, the solution, already implemented in the 1990s, is a bridge which enables comfortable passage, with gentle slopes, over the train tracks. They use the same solution in Astorga, at the entrance to the city (**Figure 8**) to ensure that pilgrims do not have to use the recent, and very busy, crossing on the main road. This work, carried out by Grusamar Ingeniería in the early 2000s, responds to a specific programme of the *Administrator of Spanish Rail Infrastructure* and the *Spanish Ministry of Public Works*, Public Works for the removal and improvement of level crossing safety¹. One of the constructions above rivers mentioned here is the footbridge over the Porma river in Puente Villarente, next to the N-601, built by *Union Temporal de Empresas Pavimenta Asfáltica de Castilla S.A.* and *Cycasa Canteras y Construcciones S. A.*, completed on 14th December 2012.



Figure 8: Entrance in Astorga

Source: google street view

In the same way, other infrastructural work carried out in many other areas, where there is plenty of space or where they could begin expropriation procedures, led to the construction of urban solutions to protect the safety and universal accessibility of paths. In many sections of the Spanish *Mesetas* we see a configuration like those in the below photos (**Figures 9 and 10**), where a white road runs parallel to the national road, with various breaks to allow – in case of necessity – access to the asphalt.



Figures 9 and 10: Spanish Mesetas

Source: google street view

5.3 Italian good practices

Good practice examples along routes are also present in Italy. Among these, the cycle paths are increasingly protected, or in any case reserved for bicycles, where motorised traffic is excluded (Tira, 2015). It's a light mobility project, which relies on landscapes through lines which re-establish territories that haven't been visited for some time. Light mobility has become a territorial project of social inclusion, cultural reanimation and is linked to new and healthy lifestyle, characterised by collective participation in environmental mitigation, from reception to a different development structure. All this is not just to focus on active mobility, but also on slowly discovering territories and areas of our country (Pileri & Giudici, 2017). The purpose of these routes is to separate bike traffic from the varying speeds of motorised and pedestrian traffic to improve road safety and facilitate vehicle movement. For to the greater safety of cyclists, they also act as a tool for moving mobility quotas from private motor vehicles to bicycles, thus reducing congestion and pollution. Cycle tourism is finally taking off in Italy, one reason for this is the desire to save money and its pole position among cycling countries, it still has, however, few bike paths, busy cities, few cycling facilities, and its people still have unhealthy habits, such as driving distances they could cycle. Bicycle shops are increasingly widespread, where enthusiasts provide spare parts and help to repair bicycles or build them from scratch.

This is the case of the Isarco Valley, Adige and Brenta cycle paths (all part of the 'Ciclovia del Sole' project) along the Via Romea Germanica (VRG). The latter would like to be the backbone for slow tourism linking South Tyrol with Calabria, extending to the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. The project was initially presented by the Italian Friends of the Bicycle Federation (commonly known as FIAB, 2019) at VeloCity in 1991.

Part of this cultural route develops along this protected track, allowing everyone – without exception – to walk safely.

The Isarco Cycle Path extends from the Brennero Pass to Bolzano with its headquarters in the valley: to stay connected to the historical route of the Via Romea Germanica and for hiking options, the cycle path completely coincides with the route from the Pass to Valle Isarco (**Figure 11**).



Figure 11: Valle Isarco cycle path along the Via Romea Germanica

Source: google street view

Another example is the Adige cycle route (**Figure 12**), a bike path that officially begins at the Resia pass, or the source of the Adige river, and leads up to its mouth in Rosolina, to the Adriatic Sea. The section that covers 15km of VRG goes all the way to Trento. To respond to everyone's needs, the course has been designed to be predominantly.



Figure 12: Adige cycle path

Source: Alberto Conte – Sloways

5.4 The Brenta cycle route of the Po and Area24

The Brenta cycle route is rich in good examples and officially goes from Levico Terme to Bassano del Grappa, which winds continuously and only independently in the Trentino section, while in Veneto it forces passage near cars if travellers want to avoid travel on dirt roads next to the river. In any case, for about 40km, from Levico to Primolano, the route runs on its own individual path, with excellent asphalt conditions and even refreshment points for cyclists. This feature should be an example for any pilot accessibility project in Italy (**Figure 13**).



Figure 13: Brenta cycle path

Source: Alberto Conte – SloWays

Another example of universal usability of naturalistic routes is the Po cycle path: part of the Via Romea Germanica, the route is paved for about 11km on the embankment between Polesella and Francolino and shows it is possible to create viability solutions for all (**Figure 14**).



Figure 14: Po cycle path, part of the Via Romea Germanica

Source: Alberto Conte – SloWays

Another good practice is that of Area24 in Liguria. The cycle-pedestrian route of the Coastal Park of *Riviera dei Fiori* is located on 24km of the old railway line that from 1872 to 2001 served western Liguria. This railway line, portrayed in many books and films thanks to the beauty of the areas it passes, is a part of history, a witness to the development and changes of the Riviera dei Fiori. In 2004, the Area24 company revived this enchanting journey, which fascinated artists and intellectuals from all over Europe, making the most of their potential and restoring a space to the community in the heart of the Riviera, designed and built to provide comfort, wellbeing and fun (**Figure 15**).



Figure 15: Parco Costiero Riviera dei Fiori cycle-pedestrian path (Ponente figure)

Source: Strade autostrade italiane

5.5 The Via Francigena and the blind

In the Valle d'Aosta the great commitment of *Cooperativa Sociale C'era L'Acca* brought concrete results to the ministerial route, mainly taking care of people with visual impairments. In 2016, in the Valle d'Aosta section of the Via Francigena, the "Via Francigena per tutti" project was launched, an initiative promoted by the Lions Clubs of the region and supported by the Regional Departments of Agriculture and Tourism and the municipality of Quart. The experimentation has fielded several objectives:

- Carry out interventions to improve accessibility for people with visual impairments, limited mobility and intellectual disabilities;
- Support economically disadvantaged people through the creation of work;
- Contribute to the historical, cultural, spiritual and touristic promotion of the Via Francigena.

On this first stretch, about 2km long (from the Mater Misericordiae Monastery to the Quart Castle), we proceeded to create a curb, which acts as a "guide", and tactile improvements. The irrigation canal that runs along the route was then secured by laying grids that prevent accidental falls.

Following the same methodology for 2018, new improvements are planned in a section along as many km to the north. Among the planned improvements are the laying of curbs; the realisation of tactile indications; the safety of some paths; the relocation of vertical signs; the creation of two tactile maps and the cleaning of the route.

5.6 The "bad examples" take us further

"An ounce of good example is worth more than a quintal of words." Surely the reader will recognise themselves in the words of St. Francis de Sales, while on social networks live by words and voices. Perhaps even more powerful are those (negative) examples, which due to their irrationality force a bitter smile that stays in mind. Our journey thus starts with a bar in Rome, which "to expand" its business decided to place some tables in front of the restaurant. But to avoid stealing parking from potential patrons (people

with disabilities were clearly not considered as such), they decided to use the spaces reserved for those with disabilities.



Figure 16: Rome

Source: authors

Unfortunately, this is not fake news. The media reported the incident to the police who had the squatter removed. A striking example of malpractice which is unfortunately well rooted: the parking spaces dedicated to the disabled become places to leave rubbish for collection or porta-potties or even places to park bikes and motorbikes. Few know that the yellow lines next to or behind a disabled space have the function of marking the manoeuvre space useful for getting in and out a car with a wheelchair.

Parking spaces can also become spaces dedicated to public parks, as is evident from this photo taken in a town in Agrigento (**Figure 17**). Certainly, bad parking does not stop at these trifles. Just take a photo in any town (large, small, urban or country) to see how wild parking spaces create a maze of obstacles for everyone, and even more for a person with limited mobility or senses who often have to travel obstacle courses to find a way back to their original path. A culture of diversity must therefore begin with respect and good manners.



Figure 17: A parking space in agrigentino

Source: authors

Perhaps it is convenient to think that the problem is too widespread and rooted in society to intervene. But are the infinite number of ramps used to climb onto pavements or small staircases for everyone?

The regulation states that the slope must not exceed 8% (for every metre of length, it must increase by 8cm) and that they are wide enough to let a motorised wheelchair through. Exactly (the irony is obvious) as was constructed in the underground station of an Italian city, Rome in this case, where two rails with a slope worthy of a runway for a ski jump were laid with a lot of imagination (**Figure 18**).



Figure 18: Rome

Source: authors



Figure 19: Impossible access

Source: authors



Figure 20: Impossible access

The solution chosen by some retailers is very similar: the ramp is too steep or made of very slippery material, disabled people must 'do it themselves' with an inadequate slope, narrow and rusty. The solution made by some surveyors, who in an Italian public garden designed a concrete slope next to the staircase, which was too steep and narrow for anyone, even for a mother with a stroller; is certainly not an adequate solution. Chosen for its convenience – it's not necessary to think of alternatives or do

ad hoc work – this method was repeated on other occasions, where the ramps are more or less the same length as the stairways. In addition to not being up to standard, they are inadequate: such a slope cannot be climbed alone (**Figures 18, 19 and 20**).

The logic of ramps without steps proves too often distorted and dangerous (**Figures 19 and 20**), as can be seen in the captured photos posted on the D4n internet group (Design for nobody; **Figures 21,22 and 23**), where the ramp ends against a wall or is interrupted by steps that it should instead pass over. These structures are constructed by regulatory duty and without the thought that they accessible.

The same can be said for **figure 24** where, in the middle of a pavement there is a lamp post which reduces the width of the path, effectively preventing a wheelchair from passing.



Figure 21, 22 and 23: Impossible access

Source: Design for nobody



Figure 24: Impossible access

Source: Design for nobody

Logic would assume that alternative routes for people with disabilities – specifically designed to allow them full use of spaces – are free from obstacles. Like the barriers that have been placed to prevent improper use by motorcyclists. One of the two images was taken at Termini Station in Rome. The other is the underground entrance in an Italian city centre.

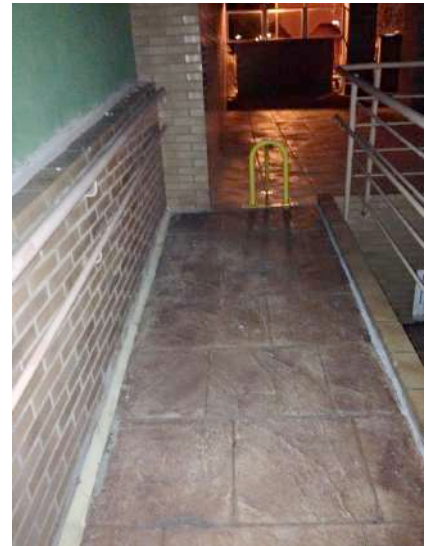


Figure 24 and 25: impossible access

Source: Design for nobody

Conclusions for the future

The good and bad practices illustrated beside a particularly avant-garde legislation and the different and often forgotten regional ecomunal policies, lead to the conclusion that these practices have good results in some regions like Veneto, Liguria and Val d'Aosta, but most Italian territories do not act, and too often act badly! Our first reflection is that the whole country should be responsible! An Italy that cultivates culture as its resource and heritage must re-establish the civility which began with Humanism and the Romans, which put people first, offering equal opportunities to all.

And in this view, cultural and tourist routes, starting with pilgrimages, can truly take on a strategic role on the basis of sustainable development starting with society. The Extended Partial Agreement of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe could be the most suitable means for dealing with and sharing this topic along the routes.

The Municipalities crossed by cultural route could jointly sign an Accessibility Charter to be submitted to the Council of Europe through each national government and the European network leader, certified by the Council of Europe for route management.

The need for a "Regulatory Specification and Regulations" then emerges to be followed to raise awareness and act on issues of universal accessibility of paths, taking tourists with specific needs into account. This should be done in a reasonable amount time and action concrete improvements along routes and services for slow tourists.

Lastly, based on the knowledge of good experiences in Europe, it would be strategic to

create a detailed archive of good practices from which to "take inspiration" for new improvements; a free consultation database which opens the debate on regulations and current and future solutions involving local communities above all, which are the true players of our territories.

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¹ Specifically, the structure consists of a metal walkway with a central arch of 55.41m above the railway and the road, equipped on both sides with access ramps of a length of about 300 meters..